

January 2, 2007

Press Release | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio sent a letter last week to the Secretary of the Interior urging him to strongly reconsider a proposal that would increase fees at Crater Lake National Park and Lava Beds National Monument. Under the proposal, entrance fees at Crater Lake would double, from \$10 to \$20, and fees at Lava Beds would increase from \$10 to \$15.

While visitation to national parks has been decreasing nationwide, Crater Lake National Park has bucked the trend, with its attendance holding steady for the past 10 years. Park officials attribute the steady visitation at Crater Lake to regular return visits by Oregonians.

"It doesn't make sense to increase park fees while national parks are struggling to attract visitors," DeFazio said. "I am concerned that the increase in fees at Crater Lake will discourage regular visits by Oregon families."

"I agree that the national park system is in need of additional funding, but raising fees for park visitors will only drive visitors away. Instead, the Department of the Interior should raise the money it needs to improve the park system by collecting the royalties that oil companies owe the United States."

The text of the letter is below.

December 29, 2006

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Secretary Kempthorne,

I was disturbed by recent reports that the US Park Service is proposing to double fees at Crater Lake National Park and increase fees at Lava Beds National Monument. I strongly urge you to reconsider this proposal.

Crater Lake National Park has been bucking the trend of declining national park visitation. Park officials attribute the steady visitation at Crater Lake to regular return visits by Oregonians. I am concerned that the doubling of fees will deter regular trips by Oregon families and Crater Lake

will join the parade of national parks experiencing declining visitation.

I have similar concerns with increased fees at the Lava Beds National Monument. A November Los Angeles Times article reporting on declining National Park visitation highlighted the Superintendent at Lava Beds National Monument bemoaning the lack of visitors. Surveys on visitation have found that 78% of Latinos said they didn't visit national parks because they are too expensive. It is difficult to comprehend how increasing fees promotes visitation and increase revenue for park units or the system at large. It simply defies the basic economic laws of supply and demand.

I am addressing my concerns to you because I believe the proposed fee increase represents the larger issue of misplaced priorities within your Department. For the past several years, Congress has provided funding above and beyond the President's request to address the maintenance backlog throughout our national park system. I appreciate that your budget is subject to review and amendment by the Office of Management and Budget, however, I would hope that the FY08 budget realistically reflects the unmet needs of the national park system and requests additional general funds from the Congress. I am sure we agree that our national park system is in great need of additional funding but I believe these fee increases will be counter-productive.

Beyond my concerns regarding park funding, there is an issue of social equity at play. On the one hand the Park Service is proposing to double fees paid by hard-working taxpayers to use their public lands. Meanwhile, your Department is abandoning efforts to collect royalties from oil companies who are flush in profits. If the same vigor used to justify fee increases was put towards collecting the appropriate royalties from oil companies the Department and taxpayer might be better off.

As the new Congress convenes, I intend to work with the new Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources to pursue oversight on these issues and highlight these misplaced priorities. Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of my views and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/

PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress